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Security Council

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Report of the Security Council mission on the Kosovo issue

I. Terms of reference of the mission

1. On the basis of a proposal by the Russian Federation, the Security Council decided to undertake a mission on the Kosovo issue, as conveyed to the Secretary-General by the President of the Security Council in his letter of 19 April 2007 (S/2007/220). On 24 April, the Security Council received a comprehensive briefing on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno. The mission took place from 25 to 28 April. The mission had the terms of reference set out below.

2. The year 2007 emerges as a significant year for Kosovo. In the light of the recent submission of the United Nations Special Envoy's set of proposals to the Security Council, the Council has decided to give its members the opportunity to inform themselves on the situation on the ground, by sending a Security Council mission to Belgrade and Kosovo, from 25 to 28 April 2007. The mission will also visit Brussels and Vienna. A balanced programme and comprehensive schedule of meetings will provide the Security Council members with a first-hand understanding of progress made since the Security Council approved resolution 1244 (1999). It will allow the Security Council to have an informed understanding of the political, social and economic situation in Kosovo. Earlier Council missions took place in April 2000, June 2001 and December 2002.

3. The mission had the following objectives:

(a) To obtain first-hand information on progress made in Kosovo since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), including on the implementation of the agreed standards;

(b) To receive information directly from the leadership of Serbia and the Provisional Institutions for Self-Government of Kosovo and from representatives of Kosovo's ethnic minorities communities on the current political, social and economic situation in Kosovo, as well as on the regional situation;

(c) To receive information directly from representatives of the international community, in Brussels and on the ground, on the current political, social and economic situation in Kosovo, as well as on the regional situation.

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II. Composition of the mission

4. The mission was composed of the following members:

Ambassador Johan C. Verbeke, Head of Mission (Belgium)
Minister Counsellor Li Junhua (China)
Ambassador Basile Ikouebe (Congo)
Ambassador Jean-Marc de la Sablière (France)
Ambassador Leslie K. Christian (Ghana)
Ambassador Hasan Kleib (Indonesia)
Ambassador Marcello Spatafora (Italy)
Ambassador Ricardo Alberto Arias (Panama)
Minister Luis Enrique Chávez (Peru)
Minister Mutlaq M. Al-Qahtani (Qatar)
Ambassador Vitaly Churkin (Russian Federation)
Ambassador Peter Burian (Slovakia)
Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo (South Africa)
Ambassador Karen Pierce (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad (United States of America)

III. Activities of the mission and summary of meetings

Brussels

5. Before visiting the region, the mission visited Brussels on 25 April, where it had discussions with the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); the Special Envoy of the European Union for Kosovo, Stefan Lehne; and the European Enlargement Commissioner, Ollè Rehn.

6. The Secretary-General of NATO described the security situation in Kosovo as calm but tense. The political process in recent months had raised expectations in Kosovo. He cautioned that as long as Kosovo's status remained undefined, and its economic development inhibited, the situation in both Kosovo and the region remained at risk. Parties might wish to establish faits accomplis on the ground. He stated that the maturity of Kosovo's political leaders had grown significantly. The Secretary-General assured the mission that the Kosovo Force (KFOR) was ready to swiftly and effectively respond to security challenges and stressed that violence would not be tolerated.

7. The Secretary-General supported the Kosovo settlement proposal and recommendation on Kosovo's future status prepared by the Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari. NATO was preparing to lead the international military presence in Kosovo as envisaged in the settlement proposal. Under the proposal, NATO would maintain responsibility for ensuring a safe and secure environment, it would supervise and train the envisaged Kosovo Security Force, and would manage the dissolution of the Kosovo Protection Corps. The protection of identified Serb patrimonial and religious sites in Kosovo, which he expected would be required for the foreseeable future, was a long-term priority and NATO was prepared to carry out this task as long as necessary. The Secretary-General emphasized that NATO would need a Security Council resolution under Chapter VII in order to accomplish these tasks.

8. Mr. Lehne believed that maintaining the status quo in Kosovo was not possible and that further delay in the process was in nobody's interest. He emphasized the responsibility of the European Union for Kosovo and the Union's special interest in maintaining a stable and secure region. The European Union had five objectives regarding the Kosovo issue, namely (a) a commitment to building a multi-ethnic Kosovo; (b) creating functional institutions based on local ownership and accountability; (c) a clear intention not to establish an international protectorate; (d) full engagement with Serbia; and (e) continued engagement with Kosovo's regional neighbours. In order to pursue these objectives, the European Union was carrying out forward planning for its future role in Kosovo, without prejudging the outcome of the future status. Mr. Lehne recalled that the European Union had indicated its full support for the Special Envoy's settlement proposal.

9. Commissioner Rehn stressed that the European Union had a special stake in the successful outcome of the Kosovo future status process. The approach adopted by the Special Envoy offered the necessary solutions. Mr. Rehn underlined the need for a Security Council resolution that would provide legal and political clarity. In emphasizing the commitment of the European Union to providing Kosovo with a European perspective, he noted that only sovereign States could enter into contractual relations with the European Union, a necessary step in the accession process. Mr. Rehn believed that the incentive and prospect of the eventual integration of Kosovo into European institutions would provide a strong catalyst for Kosovo's leaders to pursue the implementation of standards and build a multi-ethnic, functional Kosovo. He also addressed the issue of whether Kosovo would set a precedent for other "frozen conflicts", and noted that it would be up to the Security Council to decide whether this would be the case. He believed that the Kosovo issue was sui generis, the result of a unique set of circumstances.

Belgrade

10. On 26 April the mission had meetings in Belgrade with the Prime Minister of Serbia, Vojislav Kostunica, and members of the Negotiating Team. The mission also met informally with representatives of civil society.

11. Prime Minister Kostunica stated that, despite the constructive approach of the Serbian delegation, no agreement on Kosovo's future status had been reached. The Albanian side considered Kosovo's independence as the only viable solution. The Special Envoy, on his part, based his proposal on the presumption that Kosovo's independence was predetermined. The Prime Minister rejected such an approach and reiterated that Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) had not been fully implemented. He particularly emphasized the lack of returns of internally displaced persons, the destruction of Serb property and patrimonial sites, insufficient freedom of movement for the Kosovo Serbs and failure to bring to justice perpetrators of violence against the Serbs.

12. The Prime Minister noted that Serbia was not satisfied with the status quo. In this regard he favoured direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina. Serb-Albanian relations had a long history and in his opinion should not be judged by the past decade alone. Serbs and Albanians were able to live side by side in southern Serbia and some 30,000 still lived in Belgrade. This, in the Prime Minister's opinion, proved that the two communities could repair their relations in Kosovo. At the same time, he rejected threats of violence with a view to seceding from Serbia. He stated

that the Kosovo problem could be resolved through "supervised autonomy", which in his opinion was a democratic and open solution. Unlike independence, such an arrangement could be adjusted at a later stage. Serbia had proposed this option to the Special Envoy at the beginning of the Vienna talks, but it had never been properly discussed. He expected the Security Council mission to give the autonomy option a thorough consideration.

13. A member of the Negotiating Team and adviser to the Prime Minister, Mr. Slobodan Samardzic, noted that negotiations had never been held on the Special Envoy's proposals with regard to constitutional arrangements, justice and the international presences. Since September 2006, there had been virtually no meetings, despite unfinished talks on decentralization and religious sites. The high-level meeting held following the presentation of the Special Envoy's proposal favoured only one side. Mr. Samardzic therefore considered that the status proposal was not based on the outcome of the parties' talks, and suggested that negotiations be continued.

14. The Coordinator of the Negotiating Team, Mr. Leon Kojen, outlined the Serbian proposal for broad substantial autonomy under international supervision. This arrangement envisaged that Kosovo would be vested with executive, legislative and judicial powers while Serbia would retain control over foreign policy, defence, border control, monetary and customs policy, and the protection of Serbian religious and cultural heritage and human rights. Such autonomy would be renegotiable after a certain period. Serbia was willing to discuss Kosovo's access to international financial institutions. Kosovo would have a choice: either special representation in Serbia's institutions, or full participation in the political institutions at the central level.

15. The President of the Coordination Centre for Kosovo, Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic, noted that currently some 209,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo remained in 92 collective centres. Only 2 to 5 per cent of internally displaced persons had been able to return to Kosovo since 1999, and most of them were over 65 years old. According to her, lack of freedom of movement and insecurity were the main obstacles to return. Occasional attacks on returnees sent a negative message to the Serbs. Some 156 Serbian churches had been destroyed since 1999 but only those damaged in March 2004 had been slowly reconstructed.

16. The mission then met with the President of the Republic of Serbia, Boris Tadic.

17. President Tadic stated that resolution 1244 (1999) had not been fully implemented, in particular in terms of the safe return of internally displaced persons. Conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants had not been created. The return of Serbian military and police personnel, resulting from the reference to the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in resolution 1244 (1999), had not occurred.

18. He further indicated that Serbs in Kosovo lived in fear of a repetition of the violence of March 2004. While there had not been any major security incidents recently, low-intensity violence against Serbs and Serbian Orthodox patrimonial sites continued. In his opinion, these violent acts were aimed at the elimination of the remaining Serb pockets in Kosovo.

19. President Tadic claimed that Serbia's sovereignty over Kosovo, reaffirmed in Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), had been challenged by the Special Envoy's proposal. According to him, the settlement proposal failed to provide for effective self-government. It offered Kosovo Serbs less than they already had and did not go far enough in the protection of Serb patrimonial sites. Serbia's plan for substantial autonomy had not been given proper consideration. Therefore, President Tadic opposed the Special Envoy's plan and held that further negotiations, including direct talks, were the only way forward. He was particularly concerned that Kosovo's independence could destabilize Serbia and undermine regional stability, thus damaging European prospects for the Balkans. President Tadic believed in the possibility of reconciliation with Kosovo Albanians, emphasizing that Serbia was a different, democratic country from that of the Milosevic regime. President Tadic ruled out any use of force by Serbia and rejected threats of violence as an argument in favour of Kosovo's independence.

20. Afterwards, the mission held a discussion with the Chairman of the National Assembly and members of the party caucuses.

21. Representatives of political parties in the National Assembly almost unanimously rejected the Special Envoy's settlement proposal for Kosovo and favoured a "supervised autonomy" and the continuation of talks. The representative of the Serbian Radical Party asserted that, in case of independence, Kosovo would eventually be returned to Serbia anyway. Other parties stressed their support for Serbia's integration into Europe, while emphasizing that Serbia's agreement to Kosovo's independence as a condition for European Union accession was unacceptable. The head of the Vojvodina Deputies Group — drawing a parallel between Vojvodina and Kosovo — asserted that if an option entailing Kosovo's autonomy were chosen, Vojvodina would demand the same level of self-rule.

Pristina

22. After arrival at Pristina, the mission received a comprehensive briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Joachim Rücker, on 27 April 2007, as well as a briefing by the Commander of KFOR, General Roland Kather.

23. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General provided the members of the Security Council with an overview of the progress made by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), with a particular focus on the elements contained in paragraph 11 of the resolution. UNMIK had established Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, to which it had transferred all non-reserved competencies. Rule of law structures had been established and consolidated, and institutions required for a market economy had been created. In the area of returns of internally displaced persons, structures and financing for returns were in place and were being provided by the Provisional Institutions. Nonetheless, more progress was certainly required. The main concern for those wishing to return was the lack of economic prospects, together with a lack of clarity on Kosovo's future status. The Special Representative noted that Kosovo was not yet a truly multi-ethnic society, but significant steps had been taken in that direction, including the establishment of structures for multi-ethnicity. The reasons for this included the legacy of the Milosevic regime, the non-participation of Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo's central institutions, and the existence of parallel structures. He concluded that UNMIK had achieved what was possible, and

that any further progress was dependent on a resolution of Kosovo's status. While the population of Kosovo continued to trust the United Nations, it was increasingly frustrated by the lack of definition of Kosovo's status, and awaited action by the Security Council in this regard.

24. The Commander of KFOR briefed the mission on the security environment in Kosovo, which was generally calm and had been stable in the past eight months under his tenure. However, he cautioned that as long as Kosovo's status remained undefined, the situation in both Kosovo and the region remained at risk. KFOR was prepared to respond forcefully and effectively to any security challenges. He reassured the mission that, under any new arrangement, there would be no change in the mandate and mission of KFOR, and that its organization and size would remain unaltered in 2007, and most likely also in 2008.

25. The Security Council mission met with the Kosovo Team of Unity (President Fatmir Sejdiu, Prime Minister Agim Ceku, PDK leader Hashim Thaci, ORA leader Veton Surroi, Mr. Blerim Shala and Mr. Skendet Hyseni).

26. President Sejdiu conveyed the Team of Unity's unanimous and unqualified support for the Kosovo settlement proposal and status recommendation. He regretted that, despite a lengthy negotiation process, it had not been possible to reach an agreement with the Belgrade authorities. The President reiterated that Kosovo was prepared to implement the settlement proposal in its entirety, in accordance with a recent Kosovo Assembly resolution. He emphasized that Kosovo's society was committed to a multi-ethnic state, whose goal would be integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The Team of Unity believed that any further delay in the status process would be detrimental to Kosovo — it would not serve the interests of Kosovo's economy or of its minority communities. Kosovo's independence as outlined in the Kosovo settlement proposal now before the Security Council was the only acceptable option. Other solutions could not be contemplated. Kosovo was ready to assume the responsibilities associated with its independence.

27. The mission met with Prime Minister Agim Ceku and all 15 Ministers of the Kosovo provisional government.

28. Prime Minister Ceku emphasized that, during almost eight years of United Nations administration, Kosovo's infrastructure had been rebuilt. Its institutions were in place, its budget fully financed from its own revenues, and its law enforcement structures well established. He assured the mission that Kosovo would fully implement the settlement proposal. The Prime Minister was of the view that any further delay in the Kosovo status process would achieve nothing. The mission was further briefed on achievements in key areas of standards, namely, functioning provisional institutions, returns, property, and cultural heritage. Kosovo's institutions had been built up since 2001; they now included 11 per cent minorities. Returns of internally displaced persons were a priority for the Provisional Institutions, which had established a process and structures for returns. The vast majority of homes had been rebuilt and substantial financing for returns projects had been provided. Although the provisional government was fully committed to returns, these remained insufficient. He believed that the lack of clarity on status and the lack of cooperation by the authorities in Belgrade also contributed to the low numbers of returns. Clarity on status would accelerate returns. In the area of property, practically all claims relating to private property had been adjudicated. With regard to cultural heritage, the majority of the sites damaged during the events

of March 2004 had been repaired. The Prime Minister recognized that standards had not been entirely fulfilled, but emphasized that substantial progress in their implementation had been made.

29. The mission met with the Speaker of the Kosovo Assembly, Mr. Kole Berisha, and the leaders of the Assembly political groups.

30. Kosovo had held four successful elections and its democratic process had led to the creation of a functioning and representative Assembly. In accordance with the Constitutional Framework, 20 reserved seats — 10 for Kosovo Serb representatives and 10 for representatives of other communities — were set aside in the Assembly. Mr. Berisha regretted that Kosovo Serbs refused to participate in the Assembly's plenary meetings, although they did take part in the work of its committees. The Assembly functioned in a fully transparent and public manner, and all aspects of its work were monitored and scrutinized by international organizations.

31. The mission also met with Kosovo Serb representatives, including Mr Randjel Nojkic of the Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija and Mr. Branislav Grbic, Minister for Returns and Communities.

32. The firm position of those who expressed themselves on the issue was that independence for Kosovo was not an option, and that the Kosovo settlement proposal was generally unacceptable. They stated that Kosovo Albanian leaders had refused to accept any proposals and amendments offered by the Belgrade authorities. The mechanisms envisaged in the settlement proposal for the protection and promotion of minority rights were insufficient, and would never be implemented. This was already evident in the current situation, in which breaches of rights and procedures contained in both resolution 1244 (1999) and the Constitutional Framework were common. At the same time, some elements of the settlement proposal — such as the organization of municipal competencies and financing — were acceptable. Mr. Grbic explained that no plan was ideal. No perfect plan could be prepared, and compromises needed to be made. Mr. Nojkic sought to correct the misperception that Kosovo Serbs did not participate in the work of the Kosovo Assembly. Indeed, they actively participated in the work of its boards and committees. However, Kosovo Serbs did not see any merit in participating in the Kosovo Assembly plenary meetings, given that in that venue all minority proposals were consistently outvoted by the majority.

33. Members of the mission met with representatives of the Islamic community (Mr. Ahmet Sadriu, Deputy President of the Islamic Community) and the Catholic Church (Bishop Dodë Gjergji) and with representatives of non-Serb minorities in Kosovo (Mr. Murati of the Bosniak community; Mr. Yagcilar of the Turkish community, and Mr. Merxha of the Roma community).

34. Mr. Sadriu underlined how, despite numerous meetings, it had not been possible to achieve a common language and build positive relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church. Bishop Gjergji noted the historically good relations with Islam. In the past, there had not been any difficulties in relations among religious confessions. However, he noted with deep regret the difficulties in establishing good relations with the Serbian Orthodox. Both believed that, while inter-faith relations would not be affected by Kosovo's eventual independence, independence was required to build up Kosovo's future and hope.

35. Members of the Turkish, Bosniak and Roma communities were fully integrated in Kosovo society and actively participated in the Kosovo Assembly. The Turkish and the Bosniak parties were part of the ruling coalition. They supported the Special Envoy's proposal despite its shortcomings and believed that it was a good basis for Kosovo's future and provided effective protective mechanism for minorities. They cited unemployment as the main challenge to their communities and noted the importance of targeted economic investments in minority areas.

36. The mission was provided with briefings on the current and planned activities of the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Kosovo by Mr. Torbjorn Sohlstrom, Head of the Preparation Team for the International Civilian Office; Mr. Casper Klynge, Head of the European Union Planning Team for Kosovo; Mr. Renzo Daviddi, Acting Head of the European Commission Liaison Office; and Mr. Wernet Wnendt, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Institution-Building Pillar of UNMIK.

37. They outlined the envisaged future engagement of the international community in Kosovo, as set forth in the Kosovo settlement proposal. Such an engagement would require a clear legal basis, provided by the Security Council. All planning was entirely preliminary and tentative and was being carried out in a manner that did not prejudge a decision on the outcome of the future status process, which rested entirely with the Security Council.

38. The International Civilian Office would have three broad functions: the supervision of the implementation of the settlement, overall coordination of the future international engagement in Kosovo, and the exercise of certain, limited, executive functions and intervention powers. The European Union-led Rule-of-Law Mission would function in an integrated manner, and combine police, justice, customs and correctional services. It would operate in support of the envisaged Kosovo authorities, and exercise some limited executive powers in respect of sensitive crimes. The European Commission's objectives would be to foster progress in Kosovo's structural and economic reform and ensure adequate financial assistance. The European Commission expressed concern that the lack of political and legal clarity on Kosovo's status remained a major obstacle to economic development and investment. As for OSCE, it would probably continue to work within the broader future international engagement as a free-standing mission, and would continue to draw on the strength of its extensive field presence, which currently focused on human and minority rights issues.

Gracanica

39. The mission then travelled to the Monastery of Gracanica, where it met with Bishop Artemije of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other Kosovo Serb representatives. Mssrs. Samardjic and Kojen were also present.

40. Bishop Artemije asserted that none of the provisions of resolution 1244 (1999) with a relevance for Kosovo's Serbs had been fulfilled. Since 1999, around 250,000 non-Kosovo Albanians had been expelled from Kosovo, and barely 2 per cent had returned. Around 1,300 had been killed. Kosovo Serbs were deprived of all their basic rights. The judicial institutions established by the international community in Kosovo had failed to bring to justice those responsible for crimes against Kosovo Serbs. Bishop Artemije believed that, without the creation of conditions for returns

of Kosovo Serbs, it was futile to search for a solution to Kosovo's future status. Bishop Artemije considered the Kosovo settlement proposal entirely unacceptable, in whole or in part. He complained about the quality of the reconstruction of Serbian Orthodox sites destroyed in March 2004. He had no opinion on the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and other religions in the case Kosovo would become independent, as he considered this to be clearly a hypothetical scenario.

Southern Mitrovica

41. The mission then travelled to southern Mitrovica, where it held meetings with the President of the Municipal Assembly, Mr. Mutsel Ibrahami, and representatives of the Municipality.

42. The President of the Municipal Assembly informed the mission that, beginning in 2000, local municipal structures had been successfully established. He stressed that Mitrovica's municipal government continued to make considerable efforts to implement the standards, with a particular priority on standards relating to freedom of movement, sustainable returns, and the promotion of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance. He believed that considerable progress had been made in each of these areas. Improvements in the local economy hinged on a resolution of Kosovo's status. The future of Mitrovica's governance was also uncertain, and questions remained about whether the concept of "one city, two municipalities" with a joint consultative administrative board — which was envisaged in the Kosovo settlement proposal — could be implemented in practice. The refusal by Kosovo Serbs to participate in Mitrovica's municipal government structures was a major obstacle to the concrete implementation of this concept. It was felt that any future joint administrative board should have executive and decision-making powers, and not be limited to a consultative role.

Northern Mitrovica

43. The mission then crossed the Ibar River and held a meeting with representatives of the Kosovo Serb community in northern Mitrovica, including Mr. Marko Jaksic, President of the Association of Serbian Municipalities; Mr. Milan Ivanovic, President of the Serbian Council for Northern Kosovo; Mr. Dragisa Milovic, President of the Municipal Assembly of Zvecan; Mr. Slavisa Ristic, President of the Municipal Assembly of Zuvin Potok; and Mr. Velimir Bojovic, President of the Municipal Assembly of Leposavic.

44. Mr. Jaksic conveyed extreme dissatisfaction with the lack of implementation of those provisions of resolution 1244 (1999) that were of particular relevance for the Kosovo Serb community. He dismissed all efforts by UNMIK and KFOR with regard to improving the living conditions and protections for Kosovo Serbs. He claimed that Kosovo had turned into an international centre of criminal activity and corruption. He categorically rejected the Kosovo settlement proposal and believed its aim was to create a second Albanian state in the Balkans. Mr. Ivanovic referred to recent attacks against Kosovo Serbs in a mixed area of northern Mitrovica, and held that these and other attacks against Kosovo Serbs were not being adequately reported. Conditions for return of Kosovo Serbs had not been created, and northern Mitrovica was the only truly multi-ethnic area of Kosovo. With regard to the Kosovo settlement proposal, Mr. Ivanovic believed that it would be an unacceptable

imposition of Kosovo Albanian rule over Kosovo Serbs. This prospect led to growing fears and frustrations among Kosovo Serbs.

Other locations

45. On the way back from Mitrovica, the mission visited the village of Svinjare which was destroyed during the riots of 2004. In June 2006, the Contact Group had urged the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to complete the remaining reconstruction of the village. At the request of the Prime Minister and with the agreement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Kosovo Protection Corps had been engaged in the reconstruction effort. The work had been completed by the end of 2006. However, the inhabitants of Svinjare remained reluctant to return because of security-related concerns.

46. On its way back to Pristina, while passing the Kosovo Electricity Company (KEK), the mission was briefed on the energy situation in Kosovo.

47. On 28 April, the mission visited the Serb quarter in Orahovac, where it met with the President of the Municipal Assembly, Mr. Esad Haxhijaha, and local Kosovo Serb, Kosovo Albanian and Roma inhabitants; the representatives of the Coordinating Centre for Kosovo and Bishop Artemije of the Serbian Orthodox Church also attended the meeting.

48. Mr. Haxhijaha noted that good relations between the communities had deteriorated during the armed conflict of 1998-1999, which had resulted in a number of missing persons on both sides. The municipality suffered from high unemployment. Lack of reconciliation between the two communities continued to be an obstacle to integration. The municipality was implementing an integration and return strategy; a committee on the freedom of movement had been operational since 2002. There had been no serious inter-ethnic incidents recently but the Kosovo Serbs in the town still had security concerns. Mr. Haxhijaha admitted the need for further efforts with regard to freedom of movement and returns and encouraged the Kosovo Serbs in Orahovac to cooperate on these matters.

49. Kosovo Serb representatives did not share this view. They were concerned about the lack of returns, difficulty in access to public services and institutions, destroyed property and discrimination in the privatization process. The representatives complained about psychological pressure, low-intensity harassment and insufficient protection from KFOR.

50. The mission also visited the nearby village of Krusha e Vogel, where members of the delegation met relatives of missing persons and heard an account of atrocities committed against Kosovo Albanian civilians by their Kosovo Serb neighbours in 1999.

51. The mission then visited the Kosovo Serb return site of Brestovik, where members of the mission held a discussion with returnees from that and other villages as well as from the city of Pec. Bishop Artemije of the Serbian Orthodox Church was also present.

52. Kosovo Serb representatives informed the mission that, of 75,000 Kosovo Serbs living in the region before 1999, only some 1,500 remained. Returns to this Albanian majority area were hampered by security concerns, the poor economic situation and the lack of access to social services. While reiterating their

determination to return and remain in the area, Kosovo Serb representatives indicated the lack of reconciliation and impunity for inter-ethnic crimes as impediments to returns. Long and complicated return procedures further discouraged potential returnees. Kosovo Serb representatives stressed the need to create a normal environment in Kosovo, noting that this would take some time. In their opinion, Kosovo's independence could negatively affect returns.

53. Later the same day, upon arrival at Vienna, the mission had an informal exchange with the Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, on various aspects of his proposal.

IV. Conclusions

54. The mission provided the Security Council with an opportunity to gain first-hand information on the situation in Kosovo.

55. The overall security situation in Kosovo remains calm but tense. The memories of the conflict of 1998/99 and of the attacks of March 2004 against Serbs and against the international presence are still perceptible. While the Kosovo Albanian community is confident about the future, the Kosovo Serb community is apprehensive about its prospects for the future.

56. Kosovo society is still recovering from the wounds inflicted by the conflict. Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities remain divided and live to a large extent separately from each other. The process of full reconciliation and effective integration will require a long-term commitment by all stakeholders. The commitment and readiness to build a Kosovo for all its communities, conveyed by Kosovo's political leaders, were encouraging.

57. The Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and UNMIK have made serious progress in the implementation of the standards for Kosovo. Progress has been made in establishing Provisional Institutions that are functional, and which are founded on the principles of ownership and accountability. More has still to be done, however, to implement the standards. The Provisional Institutions expressed their commitment to continue and strengthen the implementation of the standards, in particular those relating to the conditions of life of Kosovo's minority communities.

58. The return of internally displaced persons remains a critical element in the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999). The number of sustainable returns continues to be very low. Although structures for the return of internally displaced persons are in place and despite the role played by international organizations, complicated return procedures, the lack of economic prospects, difficulties associated with freedom of movement and security-related concerns were mentioned as defining reasons why returns remained limited. Opposing points of view exist on whether a solution to the status of Kosovo would facilitate or hinder the returns process.

59. The positions of the sides on the Kosovo settlement proposal remain far apart. The Belgrade authorities and the Kosovo Serb interlocutors who expressed themselves on this issue remained firmly opposed to the Kosovo settlement proposal and rejected a solution that would entail any form of independence. All called for a solution based on genuine compromise, to be reached through further negotiations between the sides. There was recognition, however, that the current status quo was

not sustainable. Kosovo Albanian representatives and representatives of non-Serb communities, on the other hand, expressed clear and unambiguous support for the Kosovo settlement proposal and recommendation on Kosovo's future status. Expectations among the majority Kosovo Albanian population for an early resolution of Kosovo's future status were very high. The representatives looked to the Security Council to move rapidly towards a solution, without any further need for negotiations between the sides.

60. The mission noted the importance, stressed by many, of promoting a European perspective for the region, including for Kosovo. This European prospect can provide direction for future political and economic development and thus contribute to consolidating stability in Kosovo and, by extension, in the region as a whole.

United Nations S/2007/257

Security Council

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Fourth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1734 (2006), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) until 31 December 2007, and requested me to keep it regularly informed of progress made in the implementation of the mandate of the Office. The present report provides an update on major developments in Sierra Leone and the activities of UNIOSIL since my report of 28 November (S/2006/922).

II. Major developments

2. Sierra Leone continued to make progress in the peace consolidation process. The capacity of the national institutions responsible for conducting the July 2007 presidential and parliamentarian elections and that of the security sector was further enhanced. Nonetheless, the Government still faces serious capacity constraints and continues to require external assistance. The socio-economic situation in Sierra Leone remains difficult. Poverty and unemployment, particularly among the young, continue to be widespread, while the Government's ability to deliver basic services to the population remains weak.

3. The registration of voters for the elections commenced on 26 February and was completed on 18 March 2007. Within the framework of its assistance programme for the National Electoral Commission, the United Nations provided the Commission with considerable policy, technical and financial support. In spite of the logistical complexity of the voter registration exercise and the Commission's limited operational capacity, the registration was a success. Some 2.6 million, or 91 per cent, of the eligible voters have registered, with women accounting for 48 per cent of the registered voters and youth below the age of 32 accounting for 56 per cent of those registered.

4. The high voter registration turnout was largely due to the country-wide campaign of civic education carried out by the National Electoral Commission, mobilization of the electorate by political parties and non-governmental organizations and the active involvement of the media, including United Nations Radio. In spite of some complaints, the main political parties expressed satisfaction

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with the conduct and outcome of the registration exercise. This success has contributed to the reinforcing of the credibility of the overall electoral process.

5. Over the past few months, political parties have stepped up their electoral campaigning activities. In this regard, it is encouraging to note that campaigning has been characterized by an increased spirit of tolerance and civic responsibility. This is also due to the intensive civic education campaign and capacity-building efforts conducted by the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission. In addition, UNIOSIL and the United Nations country team provided senior officials of the major political parties with training in conflict mitigation and dispute prevention.

6. On 23 November 2006, the Political Parties Registration Commission, with UNIOSIL support, developed a Political Parties Code of Conduct for the elections. All major political parties, including the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party, the All People's Congress and the People's Movement for Democratic Change, have agreed to comply with the Code. This was an important development, as the Code provides for a monitoring and enforcement mechanism to address irregularities and complaints in campaigning. Also, on 17 March, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, with the assistance of UNIOSIL and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), concluded a Media Code of Conduct. Under this Code, major national media institutions have agreed to exercise self-restraint and accepted monitoring of their performance by an independent panel. This positive development will help ensure more objective and professional media coverage of the elections.

7. Following the 12 December 2006 country-specific meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone, the country's engagement with the Commission has intensified. In January 2007, the Commission adopted a six-month workplan for Sierra Leone and agreed to develop an integrated peacebuilding compact with the Government of Sierra Leone. This compact is expected to provide a framework for the mutual commitments of the Government and the international community, assist the Government in addressing its peacebuilding priorities, as endorsed by the Commission, and help ensure a coherent and coordinated approach in addressing gaps in critical peacebuilding areas.

8. In February 2007, the Peacebuilding Support Office fielded a technical mission to Sierra Leone to assist the Government and key stakeholders in finalizing Sierra Leone's priority plan for the Peacebuilding Fund. Subsequently, on 1 March, I approved a country envelope of $35 million from the Peacebuilding Fund to support Sierra Leone's priority peacebuilding projects. The implementation of these projects is expected to commence in May.

9. Representatives of the Peacebuilding Commission also visited Sierra Leone from 20 to 25 March to assess progress and the remaining challenges in the peace consolidation process. During the visit, the Commission and the Government agreed to work together to complete the integrated peacebuilding compact by June, so that it could be endorsed by the new Government, following the July elections. In order to assist the Government in developing the compact, a multidisciplinary technical mission, comprising the Peacebuilding Support Office, UNDP, and the Department of Political Affairs, visited Sierra Leone in the second half of April.

10. During the reporting period, the potential impact of the political crisis in Guinea on the fragile stability of Sierra Leone was a source of serious concern. To help stabilize the situation, on 20 February, Presidents Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia visited Conakry and discussed ways of resolving the crisis with President Lansana Conté of Guinea. This visit was an important demonstration of the commitment by the leaders of the Mano River Union countries to maintaining peace and stability in the subregion.

11. On 30 April, a meeting of the Heads of State of the Mano River Union was held in Conakry to discuss the disputed area of Yenga at the border between Guinea and Sierra Leone. The summit confirmed the need to continue close consultations among the regional leaders in order to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

III. Security situation

12. The security situation in Sierra Leone has remained stable but fragile during the reporting period. The high rates of youth unemployment, persistent negative public perceptions about the lack of accountability by the authorities, the weak justice system and the lack of improvement in the living standards of the overwhelming majority of the population remain the key threats to the country's fragile stability.

13. In late April, there were a number of fire outbreaks reported in the southern province, which appeared to be caused by arson, and which resulted in a significant destruction of property and displacement of residents. On 23 April, some 50 houses were burned down in one village in the Pujehun District. It is not clear, however, whether these acts were politically motivated, although electoral campaigning by political parties has been particularly intense in this province. The Sierra Leone Police are investigating these incidents.

14. From 22 to 28 January, the United Nations Mission in Liberia successfully conducted a periodic training exercise in support of security of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

IV. Security sector reform

A. Sierra Leone Police

15. From November 2006 to February 2007, UNIOSIL, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Sierra Leone Police jointly developed a national security plan for the voter registration exercise, which was successfully implemented. A similar plan is being developed for the July elections.

16. During the reporting period, the Sierra Leone Police, with the assistance of UNIOSIL and the Department for International Development, provided training to some 2,200 police personnel in crowd control and public order management. The trained police personnel will be deployed in high-threat urban areas.

17. From 29 to 30 March, UNIOSIL, in cooperation with UNDP and the United Kingdom-led Justice Sector Development Programme, organized a conference for

the Sierra Leone Police on community policing, aimed at enhancing the cooperation between the police and the population, in particular during the July elections.

18. Although the Sierra Leone Police has received training in crowd control techniques, it continued to experience difficulties in fulfilling its duties due to the lack of logistical support. In addition, police personnel are still lacking the basic equipment needed to effectively perform their duties.

B. Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces

19. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces has continued to review its structure with the support of the International Military Advisory and Training Team and the Department for International Development. The review aims at creating an affordable armed force, given the country's limited resources, which would have an increased deployment capability and enhanced operational and logistical performance. It is envisaged that the armed forces would scale down from 10,300 to approximately 8,500 military personnel over the next few years, mainly through natural attrition and the provision of a voluntary redundancy package.

20. The Government of Sierra Leone has indicated to the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations its willingness to participate in peacekeeping activities. A few Sierra Leone military observers have been trained and deployed in United Nations peace operations; one is deployed in Timor-Leste and another two in Nepal. Five United Nations Military Observers in Sierra Leone are being considered for deployment in the Sudan.

21. Sierra Leone's armed forces continue to suffer from a serious lack of logistical support, equipment and accommodation. Some 55 per cent of the military personnel and their families are housed in substandard conditions, which impacts negatively on the morale of the troops. The main barracks in Freetown are overcrowded, with some families living in stores and armories, with no access to safe drinking water or proper sanitation. Similar unacceptable conditions exist in the military barracks in the provinces. In addition, military salaries have remained static, while the cost of living has risen. These issues were discussed on 5 April, during a special meeting between President Kabbah and the command of Sierra Leone's Armed Forces.

V. Preparations for the 2007 elections

A. National Electoral Commission

22. The National Electoral Commission, supported by UNIOSIL and UNDP, continued to make steady progress in the preparation for the July elections. On 30 November 2006, the Sierra Leone Parliament approved the constituency boundary delimitation proposal, which had been prepared by the National Electoral Commission. This proposal established new constituency boundaries that take into account the considerable movement by the population throughout the country since the end of the conflict. The July elections will be the first constituency-based elections to be held in more than two decades. The general elections held in 2002 were based on proportional representation.

23. The Commission further consolidated its operational base by recruiting and training additional staff. In particular, it engaged 270 registration supervisors, who provided training to some 12,000 registration staff who were temporarily recruited for the voter registration exercise. In addition, the National Electoral Commission used electronic and print media, town criers in the rural areas and musical jingles to educate voters on the registration exercise.

24. During the period under review, the United Nations electoral advisory team was considerably reinforced and reached its full strength by early January. There are now 19 advisers to the National Electoral Commission headquarters, of whom 14 are technical advisers and five are United Nations Volunteers. In addition, there are 28 United Nations Volunteers deployed throughout the country to support local electoral offices. UNDP has also assigned a full-time technical adviser to assist the Political Parties Registration Commission.

25. On 28 December 2006, the European Commission signed an agreement with UNDP to provide a grant of 8 million euros (€) for the UNDP-run basket fund for the elections. Japan contributed 2.8 million United States dollars ($) on 16 March, while Denmark provided some 5 million Danish kroner on 21 March. Other contributions came from the Government of Ireland, which provided some €1 million in mid-January, and the United Kingdom, which provided 2.5 million pounds sterling (£) in November 2006. These contributions helped to alleviate the shortfall in electoral funding and to expedite the completion of preparations for voter registration. I would like to thank those Member States and international partners that generously provided funds to support the elections.

B. Further electoral preparations

26. In the meantime, the National Electoral Commission commenced the drafting of election petition rules. This legislative measure is required, as there are no provisions in the 1991 Constitution or the Electoral Act of 2002 under which a parliamentary election could be challenged.

27. It should be recalled that the elections are scheduled at the peak of the rainy season and that this poses considerable logistical challenges. There will be additional pressure on the National Electoral Commission to ensure the timely delivery and distribution of election materials, particularly in parts of the country that are difficult to access. As a result, it will be necessary to ensure the availability of appropriate means of transportation, including boats and air assets.

C. Political Parties Registration Commission

28. The new Chairman of the Political Parties Registration Commission, Justice Sydney Warne, assumed office on 12 February, after being approved by the Sierra Leone Parliament. In the meantime, the Commission still faces an acute shortage of operational assets and funds. UNIOSIL, UNDP and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have provided technical and financial assistance to the Commission. They also encourage the Government to honour its financial obligations towards the budget of this important body.

29. Currently, the Commission is focused on monitoring the implementation of the Political Parties Code of Conduct, mediating disputes between political actors, sensitizing paramount chiefs on their role in ensuring the credibility of the elections and working with political parties to encourage them to promote women's participation in the elections.

30. Following the adoption of the Political Parties Code of Conduct in January, the Commission established a Code-Monitoring Committee to promote compliance with the Code of Conduct. The Committee comprises representatives from each of the registered parties, civil society and the Sierra Leone Police. The Commission also established district subcommittees. With the support of UNIOSIL and UNDP, all Committee personnel have received training in mediation of disputes and conflict mitigation.

31. The United Nations supported the Commission's efforts to sensitize paramount chiefs to the importance of allowing political parties to conduct electoral campaigning in their chiefdoms without hindrance. Additionally, the Commission invited paramount chiefs to work with the electoral institutions in addressing political intolerance, which has become a major political problem in some chiefdoms.

D. Referendum on the revision of the 1991 Constitution

32. In September 2006, the Government set up a Constitutional Review Commission to revise the 1991 Constitution. This step was in line with the Lomé Peace Agreement and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. After completing the preparatory work in April, the Commission recommended that a number of changes be made to the Constitution, including a broadening of the criteria for citizenship; protection for the environment; the right to collective bargaining; the removal of provisions relating to gender discrimination; legal proceedings in cases of human rights violations; and the creation of a separate chamber of paramount chiefs in the Parliament. In addition, although UNIOSIL had proposed that the Commission consider the abolition of the death penalty, it was decided that the death penalty should be retained.

33. Given the importance of the proposed recommendations, it is expected that they will be subject to extensive public debate, which has yet to take place. In the meantime, the Government has recently confirmed its intention to conduct the constitutional referendum simultaneously with the July 2007 elections. The Constitution provides that such a referendum should be organized by the National Electoral Commission. After considering a number of options and having consulted with the Government, the National Electoral Commission determined that it would be better to conduct the referendum in November 2008. In the meantime, UNIOSIL and other key stakeholders have appealed to the Government to separate the July elections and the constitutional referendum to allow for the unimpeded conduct of the elections.

VI. Governance

34. Progress in anti-corruption efforts and promotion of accountability has been painfully slow. The planned review of the national anti-corruption strategy, adopted in 2006, is falling behind schedule. The failure to prosecute alleged offenders on the grounds of insufficient evidence raises questions of investigative capacity of the Anti-Corruption Commission and, more importantly, of political will. The Government needs to accelerate its anti-corruption efforts, especially within the context of the Improved Governance and Accountability Pact, agreed to by the Government and key international partners in July 2006.

35. In order to further enhance its capacity, Sierra Leone's Parliament needs to establish a legal department that will be able to prepare draft bills and analyse their implications. In the meantime, UNIOSIL, in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, has launched a programme to assist the Parliament in developing legislative and institutional frameworks that would encourage a more transparent and accountable democratic governance system. The programme would facilitate the work of the Public Accounts Committee and of the committees that oversee the military and security agencies. In addition, in February and March, UNIOSIL and UNDP conducted a four-week computer skills training course for clerical staff of the Parliament.

VII. Consolidation of State authority throughout the country

36. While the decentralization process initiated by the Government, following the 2004 local government elections, has made significant progress, the devolution of authority to the district/town level remains a serious challenge. District councils remain weak and lack resources, in spite of the considerable support to the decentralization programme rendered by the World Bank, UNDP and some non-governmental organizations. The functions of some public services, notably health, education and agriculture, have only been partially devolved and are slow and insufficient, while decision-making and budgetary responsibilities still remain centralized. Further legislative measures are needed to make policies and roles of central and local authorities consistent with the Local Government Act. Moreover, the role of the paramount chiefs in the new local governance setup needs to be clarified.

37. Decentralization has the potential to reconnect the centre with rural communities and to promote socio-economic development and broader community participation. As it forges ahead, it requires proper balancing of responsibilities between the central Government, local councils, traditional leaders and community members. A major effort is needed to build the resource base of the local councils and their administrative and technical capacities. Inadequate funding from the central Government and the lack of proper revenue mobilization mechanisms deprive the councils of fiscal autonomy and render them ineffective in meeting their responsibilities. To address this, the United Nations has recently initiated a capacity-building project on revenue mobilization for local councils. The project will be expanded across the country as soon as more resources become available. In the longer term, in order to assist the process of further consolidation of State authority throughout the country, the United Nations and other international stakeholders will need to agree with the Government on the strategy for the future and on how to

streamline the activities of the Decentralization Secretariat and the Ministry of Local Government and to increase coordination within the Government.

VIII. Socio-economic developments

38. Sierra Leone's economy continues to depend on external sources for development, investment, consumer goods and industrial inputs. The total inflow of resources from development partners in 2006 is estimated at $351.5 million. Nevertheless, the macroeconomic performance of the country has been improving. Inflation is now reported to have declined to 9 per cent. In addition, the Government is in the process of undertaking a three-year mapping exercise of the country's mineral resources, with a view to generating increased revenues through the auctioning of mining rights.

39. While growth has been high, further external investments and the support of international partners will be needed to reduce poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. An estimated 26 per cent of the population lives in extreme poverty, while 70 per cent lives on less than $1 per day. The situation is exacerbated by high unemployment and deteriorating health conditions, especially with the growing incidence of HIV/AIDS, typhoid, malaria and tuberculosis and high maternal, infant and child mortality rates. Most households live in substandard shelters and only 59 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water.

40. The attainment of food security is a major priority for the Government. Rice is the main staple food and its production is projected to increase so that rice imports could cease by 2008. Increased Government expenditure on education has led to a dramatic rise in primary enrolment ratios. The focus on girls' education has increased female enrolment to near parity with boys' in primary school.

IX. Human rights and rule of law

A. Implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

41. Sierra Leone made further progress in implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, particularly those related to the creation of the National Human Rights Commission; the broadening of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission, the adoption of a binding code of conduct for judges and magistrates; and the passage of the Human Trafficking Bill. While a considerable number of important recommendations have yet to be implemented, efforts are in progress to repeal statutory and customary laws discriminating against women. The Government also took steps to implement a reparations programme for the victims of the conflict, as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and identified an implementing agency. In addition, a trust fund for war victims will be established soon.

42. I am particularly pleased to note the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNIOSIL. Both OHCHR and UNIOSIL provided technical assistance for the drafting of the relevant law, and the

nomination and appointment of the Commissioners. OHCHR also contracted the services of a member of the Uganda Human Rights Commission, who has worked with the Government and the Commission for five months. In March, in order to build and strengthen the capacity of the Commission, UNIOSIL, in partnership with OHCHR, organized a comprehensive training programme for the Commission's personnel and facilitated logistical support for its start-up operations.

B. Rule of law

43. Progress in the justice sector remains slow. A series of consultations were held among key stakeholders to formulate a justice sector development strategy, which has since been approved by the Steering Committee of the United Kingdom-led Justice Sector Development Programme. It focuses on strengthening the rule of law, access to justice, institutional capacity-building and safe communities. Through the advocacy of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the National Child Justice Strategy, which provides an overall framework to protect the rights of children in the criminal justice system, was launched in December 2006.

44. Notwithstanding these positive developments, several problems still need to be urgently addressed, including prolonged pre-trial detentions and excessive remand and adjournment of cases; structural inadequacies of the local courts; and the weak response and enforcement mechanism related to gender-based violence.

45. To facilitate the judicial reform, UNIOSIL has embarked upon a more structured engagement with all key partners in the justice sector. A Justice Sector Coordination Committee was established in February, comprising the Justice Sector Development Programme, UNIOSIL, UNDP, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Bank, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom and Irish Aid. This forum will coordinate activities in the justice sector to prevent overlapping and encourage the streamlining of various interventions and initiatives.

X. Action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security

46. UNIOSIL continues to coordinate the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) under the action plan prepared by the United Nations system in Sierra Leone. A joint UNIFEM/Peacebuilding Support Office gender assessment mission was conducted in Sierra Leone in January 2007. The assessment facilitated the development of a road map for the implementation of the United Nations action plan.

47. To promote gender equality through advocacy of women's empowerment, the United Nations country team focuses on encouraging greater participation by women in the electoral process; promoting the rights of women, including through legislation to address sexual and gender-based violence; supporting the enforcement of legislation; building the capacity of the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police; and promoting women's economic empowerment.

48. UNIOSIL has been advocating women's involvement, including as candidates, at all stages of the electoral process. During the voter registration exercise, UNIOSIL worked closely with the National Electoral Commission to deliver specific messages targeting women. United Nations Radio collaborates with community radios to enhance women's confidence and capacity to participate in the political process. The challenge now is how to translate those initiatives into greater numbers of women candidates. In this regard, the United Nations is working closely with the Political Parties Registration Commission.

49. The Political Parties Registration Commission, with UNIOSIL assistance, organized three regional workshops, which helped formulate a comprehensive strategy on increasing women's representation in key governance institutions, including in Parliament and local councils. In addition, these efforts resulted in the announcement by President Kabbah that he would issue a "certificate of urgency" for the speedy passage of three bills relating to domestic violence, the devolution of estate succession and the registration of customary marriages and divorces that are being considered by the Parliament. UNIOSIL and the United Nations country team are working with the Government and Parliament to ensure the early adoption of these important bills.

50. In my report of 28 November 2006 (S/2006/922), I indicated that the effective implementation of the action plan would require the establishment of a full-time post of gender adviser in UNIOSIL. A gender adviser has now been recruited.

XI. Public information and communication

51. UNIOSIL has been working closely with a new independent broadcast news service, Cotton Tree News, which was launched on 19 February. This project is managed by the Swiss non-governmental organization L'Hirondelle, and is sponsored by the European Union, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Switzerland. Cotton Tree News broadcasts a daily service of live news and information, which is run simultaneously on United Nations Radio to ensure country-wide coverage. The establishment of the new service marks a significant step in the joint efforts of the United Nations, the donor community and the Government to develop local technical capacity for a national public service broadcaster, so that the transfer of United Nations Radio capacity to national ownership could be considered at an appropriate time in the future.

52. UNIOSIL also took the lead, within the framework of the United Nations Communications Group in Sierra Leone, in implementing a joint strategy outlining multimedia projects to inform a wider spectrum of the public, including women, youth, politicians, civil society, traditional leaders and the media about the new, constituency-based electoral system.

XII. Integration within the United Nations system

53. To assist the Government of Sierra Leone in furthering the consolidation of peace and in fulfilling its mandate, as outlined in Security Council resolution 1620 (2005), UNIOSIL has continued to maintain close coordination with all United Nations agencies, the Government, the diplomatic community, international donors

and non-governmental organizations. To that end, a peace consolidation strategy, developed by the Government with the support of UNIOSIL and the United Nations country team, has guided the formulation of critical peacebuilding projects, which will be submitted for funding from the Peacebuilding Fund.

54. UNIOSIL and the United Nations agencies have jointly formulated and adopted a new United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the period from 2008 to 2010, which seeks to link governance and human rights objectives with sustainable growth and human development. In the meantime, the United Nations Transition Support Team, which is deployed throughout the country, continues to work towards building the capacity of local councils.

55. In addition to United Nations aid coordination activities, UNIOSIL has maintained continued engagement with international partners through monthly policy meetings and other gatherings on key issues, such as development aid, accountability, preparations for elections, human rights, security and youth employment and empowerment. The Office is also expected to play an important coordination role among concerned stakeholders with regard to the implementation of the integrated peacebuilding compact, referred to in paragraphs 7 and 9 above, once the Compact has been concluded.

XIII. HIV/AIDS

56. The United Nations continues to support activities aimed at strengthening the national response to the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. During the reporting period, the United Nations conducted an assessment of paediatric AIDS care in the country and assisted the national HIV/AIDS secretariat in developing its programme of work and national guidelines on HIV/AIDS.

57. The United Nations system in Sierra Leone has also developed a workplan within the framework of the Mano River Union and the Côte d'Ivoire HIV/AIDS project. In this regard, two blood donation campaigns were conducted, voluntary counselling was provided and several treatment centres were refurbished. In addition, a peer educators training and counselling programme in homes was launched.

XIV. Sexual exploitation and abuse

58. There were no reported cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in UNIOSIL during the reporting period. UNIOSIL has focused on training and sensitizing personnel on sexual exploitation and abuse. A joint task force established in May 2005, comprising the United Nations country team, in which personnel of UNIOSIL and the Special Court for Sierra Leone also participate, continues its activities in providing training for and sensitizing United Nations personnel and the local population on issues related to sexual exploitation and abuse. During the reporting period, an additional group of 30 United Nations personnel received training on the requirements of the Secretary-General's bulletin on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13).

XV. Observations and recommendations

59. I am encouraged by the progress made by Sierra Leone in the peace consolidation process. General positive developments within the past few months have strengthened the prospects for long-term peace, stability and economic recovery in the country. At the same time, it is also clear that Sierra Leone still needs to remain focused on addressing the root causes of the past conflict, such as promoting good governance and anti-corruption efforts, economic recovery, improving access to justice and paying increased attention to the promotion of human rights. In this regard, the country clearly needs the support of the international community. In this regard, the continued engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission with Sierra Leone and, in particular, the agreement reached between the Government and the Commission on the development of an integrated framework compact for peacebuilding, is very encouraging. I urge the Government of Sierra Leone to work closely with the Commission in developing the compact and in ensuring its successful and timely implementation.

60. The fact that 91 per cent of the eligible voters have registered for the July 2007 elections is both a demonstration of the civic maturity of the people of Sierra Leone and an important indication of the increased capacity of the National Electoral Commission. It is also indicative of the fact that the population wishes to exercise the right of choice. The forthcoming elections offer a unique opportunity to create a new social and economic dynamic in the country and to provide it with the much-needed psychological boost in favour of change.

61. The first stage of the electoral process has proven to be a remarkable success. The participation by many women in the registration of voters is particularly welcome. It will be important to continue to promote gender equality and youth empowerment by encouraging the participation of women and youth candidates in the elections. In the meantime, Sierra Leone's political parties should be guided by the code of conduct that they have voluntarily accepted, while the country's media institutions will need to display objectivity and professionalism consistent with the letter and spirit of the recently concluded Media Code of Conduct.

62. The generous contributions made by the European Community, Denmark, Ireland, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and UNDP to the electoral basket fund are key to the successful holding of the elections. The Government of Sierra Leone itself should continue to meet its obligations to the electoral budget in a timely manner. As the period leading up to the elections is critical, it is crucial that donors deliver their assistance in a timely manner to enable the electoral institutions and the security sector to carry out their elections-related tasks. In addition, the international community will be expected to actively participate in the observation of the elections.

63. In order to further advance peace consolidation, it is essential that positive developments in the political process be accompanied by a considerable enhancement of the security sector. Progress made in this area remains fragile. Both the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the Sierra Leone Police need significant additional support, especially in equipment and accommodation, if they are to effectively implement their tasks. At the same time, the fostering of a solid private sector to transform the economy and create employment opportunities needs to be encouraged. Without a vibrant economy based on free-market principles and clean

practices, the country will not be able to achieve the much-needed acceleration of its growth rate. To support social and economic transformation, both the Government and its international partners should step up efforts to expedite reform of the judiciary and to pay increased attention to the promotion of human rights, especially of women and children.

64. I am pleased to report that UNIOSIL has been effectively coordinating the activities of the United Nations system and other international partners in Sierra Leone. This collaboration has been instrumental in increasing the effectiveness of foreign assistance to help address the root causes of the conflict and in building the capacity of critical national institutions. In this regard, the conduct of the July elections will also help define an exit strategy for UNIOSIL. It remains my intention to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the role played by UNIOSIL and to submit to the Council my recommendations on the future United Nations presence in the country before October 2007.

65. In the meantime, I wish to express my sincere thanks to the international partners for their continued constructive engagement with the Government of Sierra Leone and UNIOSIL. I extend my thanks to all personnel serving in this Office for their unwavering support for the cause of peace and stability in Sierra Leone. I would also like to thank my Executive Representative, Victor Angelo, and all staff members of the United Nations system in Sierra Leone for their tireless efforts to ensure that the country enjoys lasting peace and sustainable development.

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